

Is it Possible to Uncover Evidence of a Gender Revolution within Food Studies and Professional Culinary Literature?

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Women have always been involved with food: gathering food; growing food; processing food; cooking food; presenting food; feeding their families. This is something that is true across the world and throughout history. Yet in many societies, perhaps most, women have tended to be excluded from higher-status activities associated with food, which are seen as masculine. To this day, even in societies in which women are considered ‘liberated’ from the restraints of traditional gender mores, and protected at work from the most egregious cases of gender discrimination, women are significantly under-represented as top chefs, while they continue to be identified with domestic cooking, both in the public and private spheres. Indeed despite significant shifts in the cultural and material continuities between food and gender, important continuities persist (Cairns and Johnson 2015, 10). Even now, it seems that men’s involvement with food in the public realm is seen as having more *gravitas*; as being, almost by definition, higher status.

Recent scholars (Avakian and Haber 2005; Cairns and Johnson 2015, p.172) have noted the ‘long-standing and curious division between studies of gender and food where food studies has tended to neglect women and very little of its analysis has been feminist in nature’. In this paper I consider the relationship between the domestic and professional culinary world to uncover the myriad of complexities within this world for women, and the possibility of uncovering a gender revolution within the literature. I begin by briefly outlining the historical context of the gendered culinary world, as identified above, by developing an understanding of the domestic arena, looking briefly at the historical feminist analysis of the domestic, and finally the feminist revision that has allowed a better understanding of the domestic, and the women that live within this space, without claiming essentialist views. Following from this, I examine the historical development of the professional kitchen, the revolutionary women who successfully broke into this public culinary space and the limitations placed upon their public representations. I then examine contemporary women chefs and their relationship with media forms that reinforce gendered understandings of women and the culinary. I then offer a contrasting culinary example from the global South to reveal an opportunity for food studies to critically challenge the gendered understandings of the culinary world for women, and the structural and cultural impediments that persist within it.

Understanding the Domestic

The concepts of the domestic and the professional, as we understand it today, can be traced back to the Industrial

Revolution, when two separate spheres were identified, the domestic/private/feminine on the one hand, and the professional/public/masculine on the other. Prior to the industrial revolution, most women and men’s lives overlapped. Most work was carried out around the home where women were the primary food providers and caretakers while also taking part in home-based manufacturing (Cooper 1997, pp.9-12). The Industrial Revolution banished women to the private realm of household management, child rearing and religious education as factories split the family unit. Working-class men worked in the mines, mills, and workshops and women remained in the home with the farm and family, creating the concept of ‘homemaker’. This division reinforced an already gendered world by identifying separate spheres, unequally weighted in favour of the masculine and the public. This dichotomy prevails to this day and continues to underpin our understanding of the public/private realms and the concepts of feminine and masculine. While some argue for a more nuanced understanding of this rigid division of the public and private (Pateman, 1989; Young, 1997), this dichotomy continues to underpin our understanding of the public/private realms and the concepts of feminine and masculine (Kimmel, 2008).

As a result of this dichotomy women’s work in the kitchen, has tended to be relegated to the lower status of ‘domestic work’; a term that is used so widely and so casually that we rarely pause to consider what it actually implies. The predominant feminist representations of the domestic are of oppression, entrapment, tyranny, enslavement, the ‘captive wives and housebound mothers’ (Moore 1988, Gavron 1966). This can be traced back to the separation of the public/professional and private/domestic spheres, as outlined above. Betty Freidman argued in *The Feminine Mystique* that the domestic was contrary to the aims of feminism. As a result, the relationship between the female, food and the domestic has long been identified as oppressive; a representation of powerlessness. This has excluded the female in the domestic space from telling her story, who, while working within this private sphere was able to carve out her own area of power and independence. The greater intimacy, the very domesticity that is often seen to relegate women’s involvement with food to a ‘lower’ level, also means that their cooking, writing and talk of food are rich with social context in the way that more formal involvement often is not, giving us abundant insights not just into their own and their family’s lives, but to social mores and historical context.

Re-examining the Domestic in the Global South

In recent years food studies and third wave feminists have opened up the domestic space to further investigation, to allow us to recognize the significant lives of women in the domestic sphere. An alternative, or complimentary, reading of this relationship can be found, predominantly in feminist understandings in the global South. Female anthropologists have produced a diverse set of ethnographies that put into action the formerly invisible women across the world's cultures be recognized and allowed to speak (Lewin 2006, p.13). Abarca (2006, p.19) argues that if we conceptualize the kitchen as a space, as opposed to a place, we can represent a site of multiple changing levels and degrees of freedom, self-awareness, subjectivity and agency. Abarca (2016) demonstrates, that working class Mexican and Mexican American women assert their own identities, both in their cooking and in their lives in this kitchen space. Through a series of oral histories, these women address issues of space, sensual knowledge, artistic and narrative expression, and cultural and social change. Through their preparation, planning and cooking of meals, these women share their lives as they share their savory, symbolic, and theoretical meanings of food. The oral histories represent spoken personal narratives, testimonial autobiography, and a form of culinary memoir, that speak from their kitchen space, revealing an understanding of women's power and their ability to define themselves through domestic food works (Abarca 2006, Meah and Jackson 2016).

Here, food studies uncover a relationship with food and the domestic that reveals 'opportunities' to demonstrate creativity and skill, as well as accruing values within families and communities and increasing opportunities to express resistance and power. Thus, it breaks the traditional Anglo American feminist paradigm and permits a revision of the text to allow for more a 'more nuanced, culturally inclusive consideration' (Meah 2013). As Moore (2000, p.79) states, we must be wary of portraying men as winners and women as losers. This simplistic picture denies women agency within their restricted private realm and portrays them as victims within the prison of domesticity. This dismisses all the ways in which women push against their constraints to find an alternative path for themselves.

Re-examining the Domestic in Canada

Turning to the global North, a recent study investigates the relationship between women, cooking and pleasure in contemporary middle class Canadian society. Cairns and Johnson (2015) consider the rise of foodie culture and post feminist claims of feminine empowerment, as reasons for some women reclaiming cooking as a site of personal pleasure, choice and agency. Here the idea of feminine self-sacrifice, denial and oppression associated with domestic cooking is challenged, revealing a more complex understanding of the relationship between women and cooking.

This study found an almost universal theme where women derived pleasure through cooking for others. Through a series of focus groups and interviews women consistently emphasized the social and emotional significance of cooking 'if I like it I'll cook it for you. And that's my way of showing I care'. Equally the pleasure of cooking with others was highlights 'the act of sharing and preparing food with others, that's like a fun event' (Cairns and Johnson 2015, p.148). The study found that most women enjoyed cooking at least some of the time but with a caveat, 'only if they have sufficient time and resources, are making something they enjoy, and, most importantly have someone to share it with' (Cairns and Johnson 2015, p.149). Equally, while these women enjoyed cooking as pleasurable pursuit, day-to-day domestic cooking was differentiated from cooking as a leisure activity. The former was taken for granted as part of women's daily food work; those who were free from everyday domestic cooking activity performed the latter. This study reveals inherent contradictions and persistent gender dichotomies within the domestic space. Viewed through the lens of post-feminist analysis, the women in these studies are making free choices to cook for pleasure, while couching their choices in hegemonic feminine discourse and justifications, using words such as 'nurturing' and 'caring' when explaining their reasons for cooking. However their freedom to exercise these choices is limited to their freedom from traditional domestic everyday cooking. This highlights the continuity of the embodied care and nurturing role of women in contemporary liberal society, even as they are recognized as equal participants in the public world of paid work. Cooking as domestic food work is differentiated from cooking as leisure. The association of women with domestic unpaid food work remains negatively associated with the predominantly female role of primary cook in the domestic space. This reflects the historically negative feminist association with 'lower status' domestic food work revealing the limitations of post feminist pleasurable cooking experience when viewed as cooking as leisure.

Professional Cooking and Women

The culinary literature of the professional culinary world has tended to negatively identify women's role in this space. The historic and persistent gendered world of the skill of cooking has identified women as domestic home cooks, in direct contrast to the world of the masculine hierarchal professional kitchen. The division of labour since the Industrial Revolution through to current day media portrayals, reinforces this gendered world, resulting in women being identified as 'invaders', an unwelcome and threatening force within the professional kitchen (Harris and Giuffre 2015).

The terms chef and cook are gendered and are accepted as natural, begging the question where they came from and whether we are complicit in perpetuating them. Early chefs were members of the military and were exclusively men (Ferguson 2004; Symons 2000) when, in the 17th century,

the landed nobility began to rely on chefs to prepare food. The employment of a man in this capacity was seen as a sign of one's status at that time (Trubek, 2000). As chefs began to take on more power in shaping the cultural and culinary world around them, they searched for ways to separate cuisine with a high social value, or *haute cuisine*, from the everyday, and little valued, cookery of women (Chakraborty 2013; Cooper 1997; DeVault, 1991; Ferguson 2004; Swinbank 2002; Symons 2000; Trubek 2000).

This gendered division aided by the rise of separate spheres for men and women, prevented women from participating in the growing restaurant industry in Europe (Ferguson 2004). Men controlled the means of professional legitimation such as authoring cookbooks, teaching at culinary schools, and exhibiting at culinary expositions thereby juxtaposing men in the role of 'educator' and their women audience members as 'students', helping to institutionalize the exclusion of women from professional cooking (Ferguson 2004; Symons 2000; Trubek 2000).

The terms chef and cook are directly related to the separation of the public and the private sphere. The chef means 'chef de cuisine' or 'head of the kitchen' and relates directly to the *métier* of food preparation in the professional public sphere. A chef is the leader of a professional kitchen, a risk-taker, the face of a company or concept and, above all, an expert. A cook, in contrast, is understood more as a much more working class, blue-collar occupation. The chef is a professional who goes through proper training and rises through the ranks of a military system, a term historically associated with men, whereas the cook is self-taught, home-schooled, working by instinct and has historically been associated with women and the private sphere. A chef is granted higher public status and the freedom to be creative and imaginative with his food, a cook may only be responsible for following the chef's recipes and produce food. Research shows that this dichotomous relationship is played out in the world of the professional chef, where women and men are judged according to their gendered understanding of the skill of cooking within our culture to women's disadvantage (Ferguson, 2004; Swinbank, 2002; Symons, 2000; Trubek, 2000; Cooper, 1998; DeVault, 1991).

In the film *Ratatouille*, Revel believes that 'the raw edible materials in the hands of 'mothers' can lead to some fine 'craftsmanship' but not great art, whereas the chefs have to transcend everyday methods to realise a grand cuisine which should be restricted only to professionals' (Chakraborty 2013, p.362). For Revel, a clear distinction is made between art/craft, educated professional cuisines/ domestic cooking, and male chefs/female cooks. This hierarchical stance has been historically manifested in the public realm through public institutions that have historically excluded women from entering the professional kitchen (Harris and Giuffre 2015).

The Brigade System

The professional kitchen has historically been the preserve of men in society (Harris and Giuffre 2015; Druckman 2012; Cooper 1998; Bartholomew and Garey 1996; Fine, 1996). The link between the professional kitchen and the masculine 'brigade system' of running a professional kitchen has its roots in the military organisational model. Escoffier, known as the 'father of haute cuisine' used his experience in the French army and knowledge of military organization to create the brigade system (chef de partie system), from the end of the nineteenth century (Civitello 2008, pp.285-286). A clear hierarchy ensures one's skills and status is understood by their role within the kitchen and has significant consequences for women that work within it.

The strict military-based hierarchy of cooks and chefs remains to this day. A head chef or an executive chef generally leads kitchens. Executive chefs are typically in charge of directing others and providing creative leadership in recipe and menu development tending to work in 'full service' establishments. Next in the hierarchy is the 'first line supervisor' or 'sous chef', who supervises workers and prepares food. Cooks are in charge of various stations in the kitchen such as meat, fish, pasta, and *garde manager*. The chef is the leader of the professional kitchen whereas the cook is the supervisor of a particular station, less skilled and a student of the chef. Correspondingly in the public and private representation, the chef is associated with the public, professional, masculine sphere, whereas the cook is associated with the private, domestic, feminine sphere and both are judged through this gendered lens. In their research, Harris and Giuffre (2015) found that females are overly represented at the cook level and overly under represented at the head chef level questioning whether the gendered understanding of chef and cooks reveal a bias against women based on their gender and the historical hierarchical system. In the film *Ratatouille*, when Colette is asked why there are no women in the kitchen she replies:

Because Haute Cuisine is an antiquated hierarchy built upon rules written by stupid old men. Rules designed to make it impossible for women to enter this world... People think haute cuisine is snooty, so the chef needs to be snooty. (Chakraborty 2013, p.362)

Colette reveals that cuisine is associated with high culture and the world of the professional man, whereas cooking is associated with working class people and women's work. Gender is embedded in social structures as much research has shown (Acker 1990, Cockburn 1992; Walby et al. 2007), and so too it is with the skill of cooking. Bourdieu's (1984, p. 471) contention that 'tastes are socially conditioned and that the objects of consumer choice reflect a symbolic hierarchy that is determined and maintained by the socially dominant in order to enforce their distance or distinction from other classes of society' is demonstrated very well by Colette response. The intersection of class and

gender is also evident here, as both are excluded from participation in the world of 'haute cuisine' of 'high culture' creating a symbolic hierarchy of exclusion that continues in an evolved form in contemporary society.

Women in the Public Realm- the Great Cooks and Chefs

Turning our historical gaze on the public realm there is little doubt that culinary revolutionaries have transformed the way we understand food. In contrast to the portrayal above, it is important to acknowledge the significant contribution women have made to the culinary world as chefs, cooks, food writers and educators. These influential women have inspired and educated generations of predominately women and housewives throughout the Victorian era and beyond.

As far back as 1845 Aliza Acton's cookbook *Modern Cookery for Private Families*, was a best-seller, running through 13 editions by 1853. In 1861 Britain's Isabelle Beeton's cookbook *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, became a best selling book of the Victorian era. Fannie Merritt Farmer, an American culinary writer and educator, penned *Boston Cooking-School Cookbook*, published in 1896 becoming a widely used culinary text (Avakian and Haber 2005, p.7). Culinary educators Frances Roth and Katherine Angell founded the Culinary Institute of America on May 22, 1946 in New Haven, Connecticut as a vocational training school for returning World War II veterans. Today it encompasses four campuses having has the largest staff of American Culinary Federation Certified Master Chefs.

In Ireland, Maura Laverty, a journalist and writer published four cookbooks including *Full and Plenty-Classic Irish Cooking*, first published in 1960, drawing on her agricultural upbringing featuring the traditional cooking skills of her grandmother (Clear 2003). Theodora Fitzgibbon published among others, *A Taste of Ireland* (1969). Another Irish culinary writer Monica Sheridan, published *The Art of Irish Cookery* in 1965. She was the first Irish celebrity cook with her own TV show in the 1960s 'Home for Tea'. She became a household name wide widespread appeal for housewives in Ireland (Richman Kenneally 2012, p.234). Elizabeth David, Julia Child, Delia Smith, Myrtle and Darina Allen are all household names, who have been called upon time and again to assist, advise and instruct women in the domestic space on the art of cooking.

These culinary giants are heralded as revolutionaries of their time, in their respective countries, breaking through barriers for women in the public space while also engaging with various media forms - magazines, newspapers, books, and TV. They increased women's visibility, opened up the public space for other women in the culinary arena and permitted many women to follow in their footsteps. However, it is their public representations through various media forms that offer a hiatus to the revolutionary theme. These culinary luminaries tended to, in the main, address

the culinary domestic space, as they themselves navigated the public arena. While breaking with the gendered binary of the public and private by successfully entering and winning over their public space, they also conformed to prescribed gender norms by representing themselves through various media as 'homey cooks', cooking food for family and friends, reinforcing the societal gender norms of their respective eras, that of nurture and care, the feminine, all the while educating and entertaining their viewers and readers (DeVault 1991).

Contemporary Women Chefs and Media

Contemporary society has witnessed an unprecedented growth in consumer interest in the culinary with the growth of the foodie culture. Indeed this is reflected in the unparalleled growth in culinary TV shows, cookbooks, magazines and newspaper articles. Think of the international franchise Masterchef, the Food Network & the Cooking Channel in USA, celebrity chefs and their cookery shows, culinary entertainment abounds in countries throughout the global North. Indeed television is society's dominant storyteller it provides 'a coherent picture of what exists, what is important, what is related to what, and what is right' (Naccarato and Lebesco 2012, p.16; Gerbner and Gross 1976, p.76). The culinary landscape of cookery programs through media representations is a fertile ground on which to examine culinary capital and how it reflects, relies on and actively reinforces gendered norms.

Naccarato and Lebesco (2012, p.16), examining culinary capital as represented in the Food Network in USA have argued that 'the network offer shows that are framed around traditional narratives of women who dedicate the bulk of their time to cooking for their families. This 'traditional' narrative, dating back to the 1940s and 1950s, can be identified as instructional cooking, located in the kitchen space that both creates and affirms their identities' (Naccarato and Lebesco 2012, p.42). Julia Child first encapsulated this narrative by inviting viewers to learn the basics of French cooking as a fundamental requirement for attending to family and social roles (DeVault 1991; Naccarato and Lebesco 2012, p.42). In the post feminist world, women are invited to make a lifestyle choice by ascribing to a particular TV personality, acquiring cooking skills and thereby attaining cultural capital that frames them within a gender narrative of distinction, as highlighted earlier in the Canadian example.

Their research focused on two Food Network personalities, Paula Deen, Giada De Laurentis, detailing how these programs used a well-established framework as to promote traditional narratives about cooking, gender and class. The argues that even though both personalities and their respective shows were quite different, they shared the common narrative of the traditional emphasis on women's identification with home and family. Both women

downplayed their formal training and successful professional achievements, to create personas that fit into the traditional narrative of femininity and the culinary. The genre offers viewers a mode of domestic, nurturing, femininity, that if embraced, promises to produce a sense of distinction, as viewers are applauded for the culinary work they do to care for others around them. To this very day this genre is replicated all over the world to welcoming audiences who unconsciously reinforce this gendered media form (Kimmel 2008, pp.237-257).

Shapiro (2008) reveals the gendered portrayal of highly successful female chefs, which reinforces the stereotypes of the profession. Her research focused on the West coast Bay area chefs of San Francisco, an area where Alice Waters' influence is very evident. Here the women chefs are described as running small independent restaurants that serve 'homey Waters inspired food'. Suzanne Goin, runs three fine dining restaurants in Los Angeles, she remain low profile, while at the same time receiving James Beard awards and being hugely successful in the commercial culinary space. However her culinary skills take second place to her good looks and her apparent chic lifestyle when one journalist wonders 'how is it that celebrated chef Suzanne Goin can surround herself with the most flavorful food and still have an Audrey Hepburn figure, can care so little for trends and always look so cool?' (Shapiro 2008). Here Shapiro reveals the gendered language in which women professional chefs are framed, harking back to the domestic and the feminine, reinforcing the historical framework in which women have been positioned, the private, domestic and feminine, in marked contrast to their professional achievements within the culinary world.

Mexican Women and Professional Cooking

Returning once again to Mexico, a refreshing alternative to this professional culinary landscape is available. The evolution of Mexico's culinary dining scene and professional kitchen stands in marked contrast to an otherwise male dominated professional arena. It was not until the mid-twentieth century, with economic development, that Mexico developed a culinary landscape, when the restaurant scene emerged to meet needs of office workers. However they remained fairly limited to a small number of touristy places serving continental fare, while the wealthy dined in social clubs or in each other's houses, where cooks looked toward Europe for inspiration, and women managed the kitchens (mayoras, 'majors' or 'chiefs'). The Mexican dining scene really accelerated just thirty years ago, driven by changes in Mexican foreign policy, globalization and changes in media and communication. (Laudan 2007).

In 1981, a group of women chefs and other culinary experts established *Circulo Mexicano de Arte Culinario*, Mexican Culinary Circle, as a reaction to the fear of traditions being lost with the increasing introduction of foreign techniques and foods. This collective of confident

female entrepreneurs (and some men) started the first wave of restaurants to offer upscale presentations of Mexican cuisine. This women's collective constituted an upper-class movement consisting of educated, bilingual members, with European heritage, or who studied abroad and grew up eating a Mexican version of French or Spanish food (Laudan 2007). In addition to these *alta cocina* restaurants, these women founded committees, became appointed as culinary ambassadors by governmental offices, cooked for visiting dignitaries, wrote cookbooks, and organized culinary conventions; they advocated for a new image of authentic Mexican food as sophisticated and playful, without losing its strong attachments to Aztec and Mayan culture. In 2010, UNESCO acknowledged the unique cultural heritage of Mexico's cuisine when it added it to The Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Adapon 2008: p.13).

Mexican chef Gabriela Cámara, remarks, 'Being a chef or a cook in Mexico until very recently was not an upscale thing, with hopes of fame or a great career, so men didn't stick their noses into it' (Lindeman 2016). In Mexico, men were not interested in entering this space as it had no social, cultural or economic capital. It was women who, unchallenged by their male counterparts, unchallenged by hierarchies of the global North, recognized the importance of the work carried out in the domestic culinary space, entered the professional culinary arena and elevated domestic food work to a 'haute cuisine'.

When Cámara opened her seafood restaurant Contramar in 1998, her position as a young, independent female restaurant owner was a challenge to the stereotype in Mexican society. 'I would meet people at the door and they would ask to speak to the owner because they just assumed that a young woman could not be the owner of a place,' she recalls. 'I just didn't think about it. I just kept doing what I wanted to do' (Lindeman 2016).

This culinary history reveals how women raised domestic cooking to the highest standards in the professional culinary world. They challenging the 'macho' culture at large by creating restaurants that generated international acclaim and drew the elite upper class to indigenous and regional Mexican food. They spearhead a culinary movement, becoming spokespeople and icons of their country, powerful entrepreneurs and above all masters in the professional culinary space. Women had always toiled in the kitchen with no status or prestige; these women demanded that the profession be elevated beyond blue-collar work in their country, they led the way. In Mexico, women, as around the world, have historically dominated the domestic cooking world, and it is also in Mexico we witness women elevating the domestic food work to celebrated art.

Conclusion

In this paper I have demonstrated the value of examining the domestic culinary space that challenges the notion of

women as 'tied down' that portrays women as victims, subjects of male action and female biology, removing women's agency and, in the process, dismissing the domestic and the myriad of important actions that take place within this space. In Mexico domestic food work was recognized as having an intrinsic value, where culinary heritage was fostered and then elevated by women into professional culinary arena. It is here that we see continuity between the domestic food works and the skilled professional cooking. Both are recognized as valuable and dependent on one another for culinary heritage and knowledge, and the cooking skills of women. It is here we witness a gender revolution where, women dominate both the domestic and public culinary spaces, each given respect and value.

In the global North a different gender revolution is available, one where middle class women are returning to cooking as a leisure activity when freed from everyday domestic food works. Here it is wise to caution the notion of a revolution as the historically 'lower status' food works of the domestic remains an important theme for women here. While these women navigate the public domain of professional work, they must also attend to domestic duties as unpaid 'carers' and nurturers within this space, harking back to the historical division of the public and private with its negative associations.

In the Global North, it was men who assumed the title of chef once cooking became cuisine, a distinction that cordoned women to the domestic realm of the home kitchen. The fine dining of the court kitchens that fed the aristocracy evolved into the male-centric brigade kitchens that continue today. Female professional chefs continue to be represented in the media through the gendered lens of the feminine, the domestic, and the private. By underrepresenting their professional achievements, through media representations, they continue the historical narrative of women's association with the private realm of the domestic. This reinforces the gendered dichotomy of the public and private, while also reinforcing men's association with the professional skill of cooking.

For all of the inspirational females, it is men who dominate the professional culinary at the highest levels, and women dominate the domestic culinary space. International culinary awards abound where men invariably feature as natural winners. Only seven women in history have been awarded three stars from the prestigious Michelin association (Sanders 2016). In September 2015 Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants featured only two Mexican female executive chefs, out of the ten Mexican restaurants that featured. In October 2014 Mexican chef, Elena Reygadas, won the *Veuve Clicquot* Latin America's Best Female Chef category in the restaurant awards. Chef Cámara remarks, 'So the 50 Best comes out with the woman-chef category to compensate their macho leanings. Why do they have to make a special category for women? It just highlights how unequal the profession actually is' (Lindeman 2016). The women who brought the profession

to the fore, who made the profession desirable, are now witnessing men 'leaning in' and taking over. The space long recognized as mundane domestic 'women's work' is now a celebrated and prestigious profession where men attempt to prove their dominance.

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